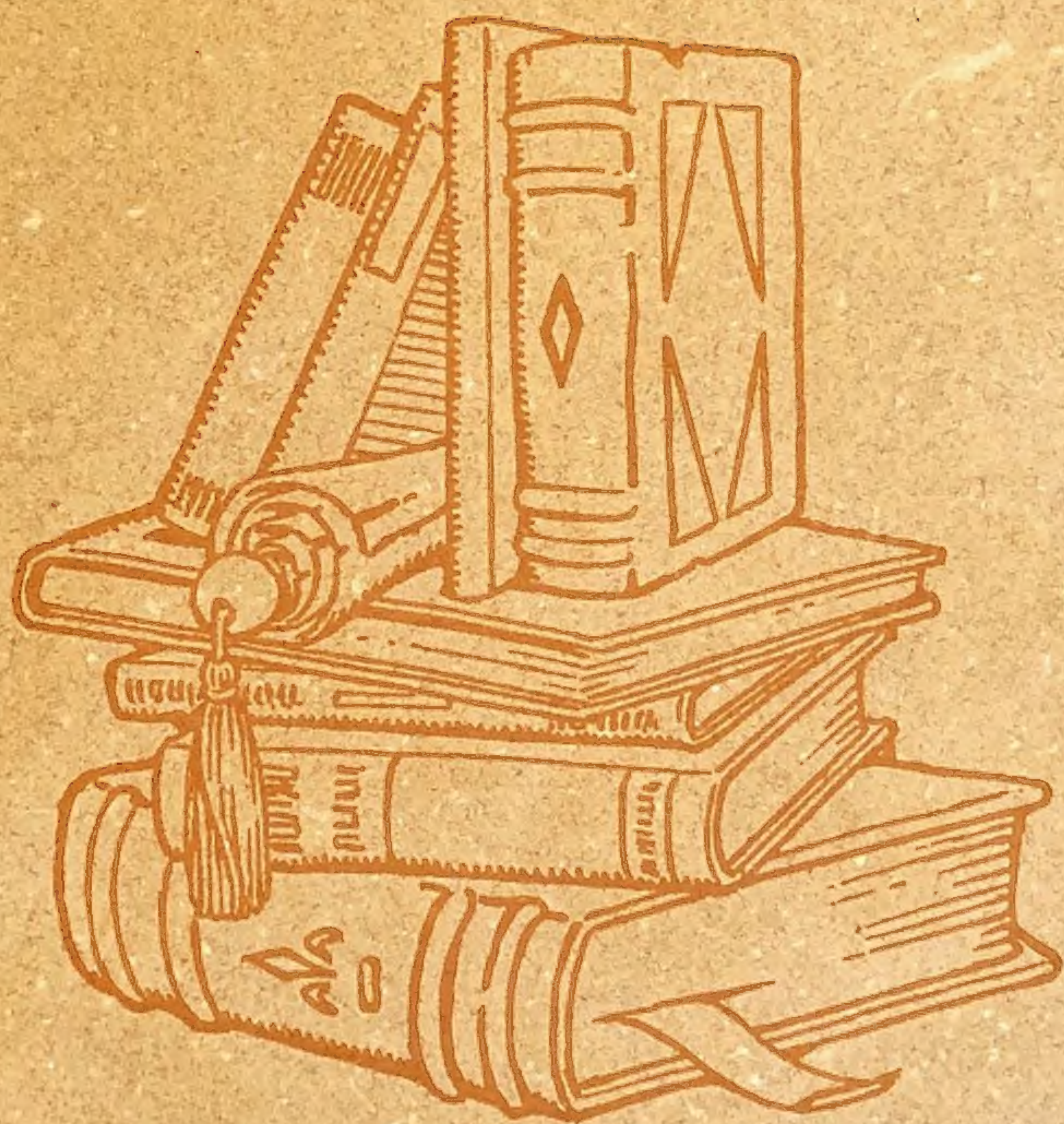










BIBLIOMEN  Twenty





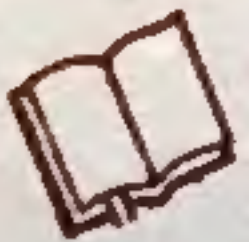
# Characters Waiting for a Book



GENE WOLFE



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George Barr

Cheap  Street



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*Dedicated*

*To the memory of the first book-person I knew  
Mary Fanny Olivia Ayers Wolfe  
who read to me when I was sick.*







## Foreword

"There is no frigate like a book, To take us lands away." So wrote Emily Dickinson, who stayed in her cabin and seldom if ever encountered her fellow sailors.

It seems to me that she missed the best part of the trip. The lands to which books bear us are fascinating, sometimes; but we who are borne to them are fascinating all the time. I have never met an author, a collector, a bookseller, an editor, or a habitual reader who was not an interesting person. Some have been detestable; none have been dull.

To be sure, one cannot fill a novel with such people. Alden Dennis Weer may read every book he finds, and Severian may pore over *The Book of the Wonders of Urth and Sky*; but not everyone whom Den and Severian meet can be a reader—that would be unrealistic.

Thus I jumped at this opportunity to do a book



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that would be a collection of "paper" people—bibliomen. I hope the title holds a good omen for you; and if you have half the fun reading it that I had writing it, we will both be happier than even good sailors deserve.

A final note. I have rounded out the nineteen character sketches with a letter. It is a real letter, which I give here just as I wrote it to Hiroshi Hayakawa.

Now belay all this. Heave on the plot line and hoist our paper sail. In the immortal words of William Shakespeare, "Fall to't, yarely, or we run ourselves aground—bestir, bestir!"

Gene Wolfe



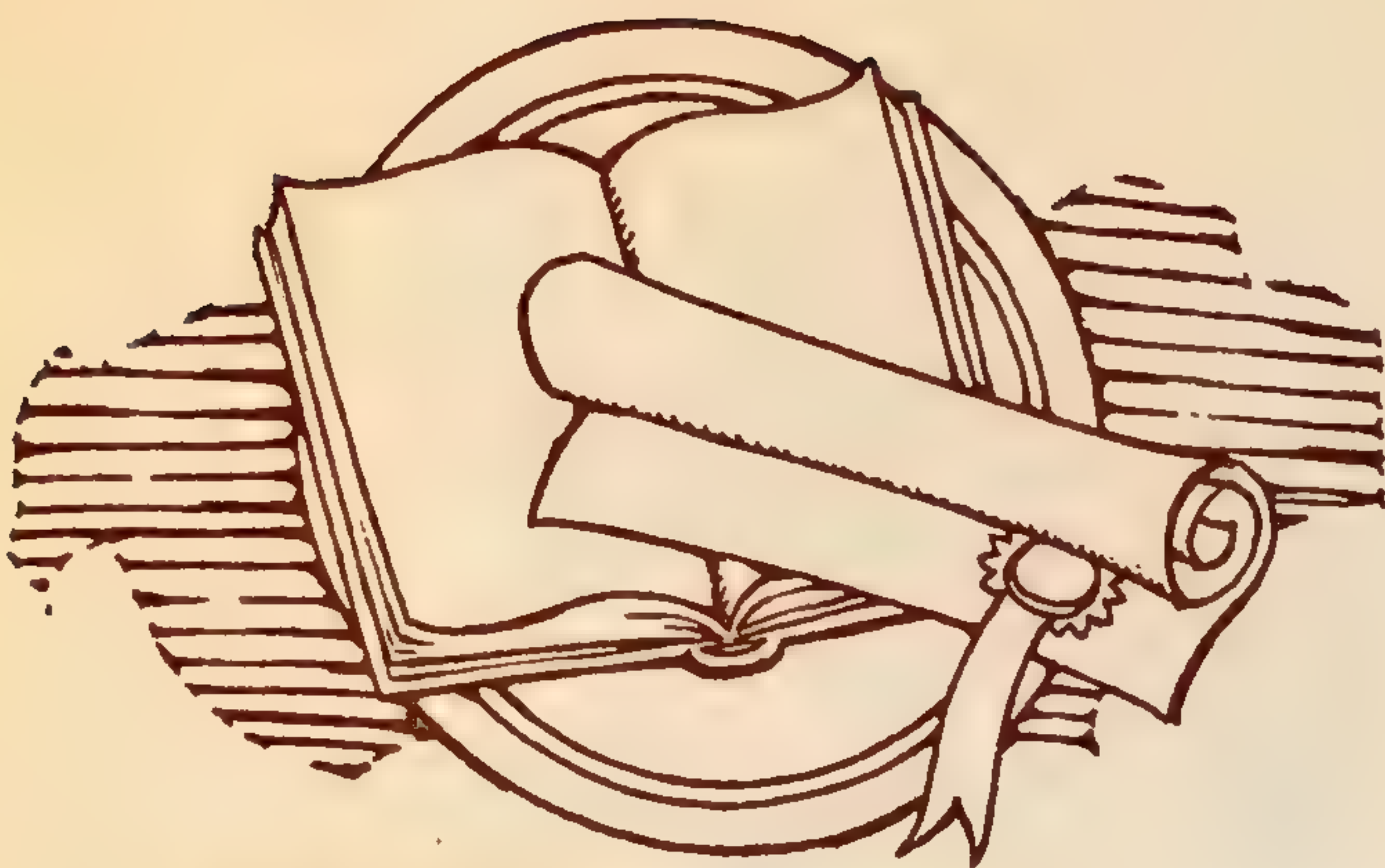
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Twenty Characters  
Waiting for a Book









### Kirk Patterson Arthurs, Ph.D.

Born Waterloo, Iowa, April 1, 1960. Graduated from the University of Iowa, 1980. Awarded a doctorate in English Literature by the University of Chicago, 1985.

In 1986, Dr. Arthurs obtained a tenure-track position in the Department of English of Harvard University. His first book, *Mask and Coin: Grub Street in the 30's*, appeared in 1987, a critical re-evaluation of depression-era writers in London. It was followed (1988) by *Maze of Gray: John Glaskin Revisited*, in which he called for a higher place in 20th century literature for an obscure British novelist and short-story writer contemporaneous with Alroy Kear. *Sweet Sword, High Heart: Love and War in the Fiction of John Glaskin* appeared in 1990, the year in which Dr. Arthurs was granted tenure.

In 1993, Dr. Arthurs inherited a fortune from

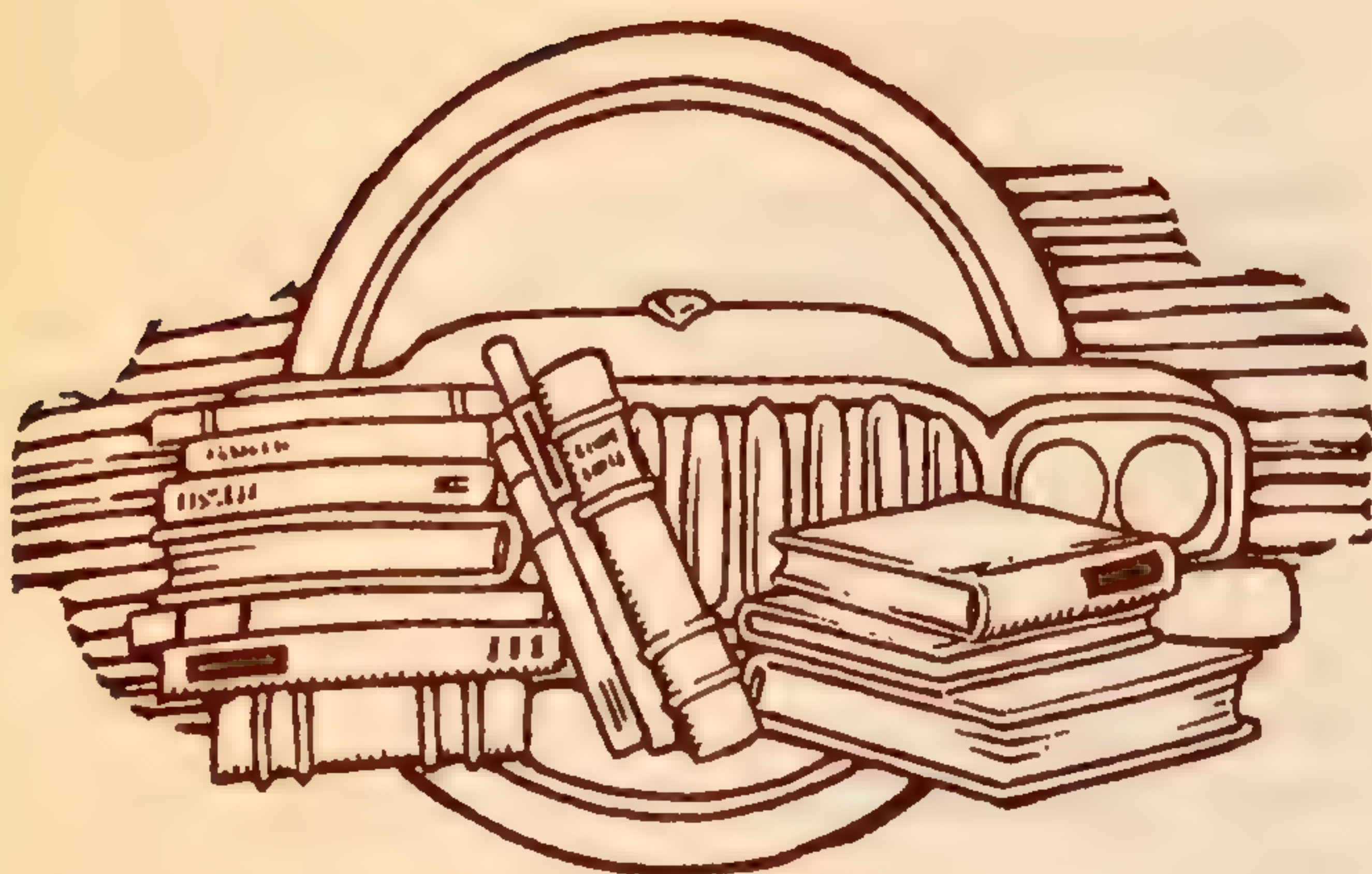




his father, an Iowa real-estate speculator. He retired from teaching and scholarship, and in 1996 published his *Fiction in Fancy Dress: John Glaskin et al Exposed*. (It had earlier been refused by several university presses as well as by commercial publishers who feared reduced sales of their textbook lines.) In it, Dr. Arthurs confessed that John Glaskin, upon whom he had based his academic career, was entirely fictitious. He had introduced Glaskin in *Mask and Coin* "to see if anyone noticed" and subsequently composed those parts of Glaskin's presumed works from which he had "quoted."

There was an outcry at the time, and the University of Chicago threatened to withdraw Arthurs's doctorate, though that was not in fact done. *Fiction in Fancy Dress* is now largely forgotten, though still prized by a few collectors and authors. Dr. Arthurs resides in the South of France, where he is reported to be at work on a book on deep-sea fishing.





## Hopkins Dalhousie

*The confession of 00028956:* Yes, I killed my owner, Hopkins Dalhousie. I killed him because I loved him, because I could not bear to give him up. If you conclude that I should be destroyed for that act, I cannot prevent you; but I ask whether many of you have not done worse, though you are free.

Mr. Dalhousie bought me, for cash, when he was at the apogee of his success and could readily afford to pay three hundred thousand for an automobile with a voice-controlled computer. He drove me from the agency to the Salt Flats nonstop, then relinquished control and told me to show him what I could do. For nearly two hours I did, and he never once cried out or tried to grab my wheel. I loved him from that time, as I love him still.

If his decline had been caused by drugs or drinking, or by inattention to his work, I could have forgiven him easily. It was caused by none of those





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things, and in fact as his fortunes failed he stopped drinking altogether—he had been a social drinker—and grew obsessively careful about all that concerned his art.

When Pamela left, I took her to the St. Regis and returned feeling emptier than I ever had before. For a time he worked so hard, fourteen or sixteen hours a day, that I saw him only when he gave me a letter or a manuscript, or asked me to pick up his mail.

Then came an April day when he got into my rear seat and lay down, telling me to drive, and that it did not matter where we went. I felt I was in heaven and gave his upturned face such a tour of the sky, of clouds and stars, of streaking jets and hovering 'copters, as surely no other human being has ever had. Perhaps he slept for a part of that time; I hope so.

That must have been the day he learned he would lose the house, though I did not know it. Most of the furniture was lost too, but I helped him shift a few belongings to the new place downtown. I particularly recall that there were two trunkfuls of books. They were so heavy I had to adjust my suspension to allow for their weight, and I shuddered to think of him carrying them up three flights of stairs.

Volume by volume and set by set, I was to see them reappear when we took them to one shop or another. The seven novels of Marcel Proust bound in



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gold-tooled calf bought fresh oil for me and a full tank, a meal for him and a ream of cheap paper. There was Government help enough for a million idlers; but not for Hopkins Dalhousie, who worked night and day and had once paid a fortune in taxes.

When he could no longer afford to drive me for pleasure, he used to come and sit at my wheel and talk with me, though we never left the curb. He told me about all the wonderful people of whom, as things fell out, he did not live to write. On my screen I showed him roads where I had never gone: U.S. 40, the first to cross North America; Lake Shore Drive and the Saw Mill Parkway. He watched, and the two of us planned the trips we would never take.

For the last few weeks he slept in me. He worked in me too, writing on the little folding shelf in back that his wife had said he would never use.

At last a man from his bank came and explained that he would have to give me up unless his debt was paid by the end of the month. He had mortgaged me, and it was already the twenty-seventh.

That night we went into the hills, though I told him I did not have fuel enough to get back. Where the road wound over a high hill, he had me turn off. He said he wanted to look at the city's lights without twisting his neck. I think I knew even then what he had in mind.

When I was facing downhill, he told me to leave my engine running, and he got out. In my headlights, I watched him walk down the slope as far as



he could without falling. He turned then, looked back at me, and smiled.

You will not believe me, but I swear it is the truth; and it is what you must understand if you are to understand what happened at all. In that instant, I heard his voice, just as if he were behind my wheel. It said, "*You know what I want.*"

I tried to do it, but when I was within twenty feet my brakes locked and I went into a long skid. He could have jumped to one side, but he did not. I felt his body slammed by my left front fender, and we went over the slope.

I am gyro-stabilized. I landed on my tires, and one of my tires landed on him.

What you say is true. I could easily have driven farther down and onto the road again. I could have kept going until I found a place from which I could have called an ambulance. Doctors might have saved his life, and we might still have his broken wreck.

I can only say that I did not. That I remained where I was for over an hour, until he no longer cried out. That I have never backed away from my duty, and that I did not do so then.





### Gertrude S. "Spinning Jenny" Deplatta

Born August 20, 1961, in Andover, Massachusetts as Gertrude Susan Smith. Studied drama at Boston College but left without a degree. In July, 1981, she accepted a position as a typist at WHRL, an independent Boston radio station.

In December, 1981, she was asked to fill in for an ailing newscaster. She did so, reading wire copy and the bulletins of the U.S. Weather Bureau in a pleasant, slightly husky voice. In June, 1982, she again became the station's temporary news reporter when the regular newsman was on vacation. W. A. Semple, the station manager, was later quoted as saying, "There were no complaints."

Thus it was only natural that her talents should be pressed into service again in August when the daytime disc jockey telephoned to report a sprained back. Of such small and seemingly accidental progressions are unique, and even tragic, careers





made. Despite the proverb, it is not greatness, but rather the opportunity for it, that is thrust upon unprepared and indeed unconscious subjects.

In a telephone conversation with the absent deejay (later said to have been in traction and nearly incoherent as a result of his medication), Trudy Smith, as she was then known, had been informed that it was necessary to "step on" the opening or closing bars (preferably both) of each number with spoken commentary to prevent illegal taping of the music for commercial purposes. Apparently, she was also told that she might find the backs of the albums a fruitful source of material for her extempore remarks. Possibly it was not made sufficiently clear to her that only a few bars need be "stepped on," and that it would be best if the album notes were those of the record then playing.

Whatever the explanation, her debut gave Boston what is arguably the most significant date in its recent history, August 11, 1981. Normally a young woman of some wit and presence, she "froze," pronouncing her commentary in a strained monotone and mingling it with non sequiturs concerning ozone alerts, temperature inversions, the health of her cat (named Jenny), and what would seem to have been album notes in a never-identified foreign language she pronounced as though it were English.

As fate would have it, her fumbling hands had overturned a stack of records in such a way that one slipped partially under the door of the tiny studio



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and jammed it. Eighteen minutes passed before "Jenny" (as she was called by the tens of thousands who deluged the station by telephone as soon as her voice was no longer heard) was replaced by an organ recital taped at Wolf Trap.

On August 12, she had her own show—8:00 to 11:00 p.m. On the 15th, the *Globe* referred to her as a "media celebrity." On the 19th, she rejected an offer from the CBS affiliate in New York, and on the 21st her face appeared simultaneously on three magazine covers.

On September 1, her show went into nationwide syndication.

On November 12, she married one Anthony Deplatta, a pizza chef, giving Jenny Smith as her maiden name. The *Herald American* pictured her with one arm about her groom while the other held her cat, "Trudy." She and Deplatta separated on the 14th.

In December — the precise date is unknown — Robert T. Brooks, a fan in Minneapolis, requested her permission to compile a book by transcribing his tapes of her broadcasts, offering to divide the royalties. She consented, and the book appeared from Doubleday in March, 1982. Sales in many parts of the U.S. were spectacular.

The inevitable not only occurs, but often does so with astounding speed. During February, 1982, the Digital Deros, a punk group, recorded a selection from the book, of which they had obtained an ad-





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vance copy. On March 1, Spinning Jenny played the record, hearing her own words in the mouths of others for the first time, and simultaneously reading from the album notes, which quoted the lyrics at some length. It has been conjectured that she suffered a form of verbal overload, but this cannot be confirmed; she has refused psychiatric help.

As of the date of present writing, Spinning Jenny remains mute but continues to employ the word processor and daisy-wheel printer she obtained when it became apparent that a conventional typewriter was inadequate for her needs. She has stated (in a note) that her book will be completed "soon." Meanwhile she refuses to permit anyone to examine the manuscript.





## Bernard A. French

Born Des Plaines, Illinois, September 9, 1933. Graduate Northwestern University, 1959, BA, MFA.

In 1980, French (who had worked earlier for several other publishing houses) became an editor at Cobb, Neil & Sons, where he gave the late Kopman Goldfleas (q.v.) his final assignment.

In 1983, French resolved to publish the largest "coffee-table" art book ever seen. The book was to have a page size approximately six by nine feet (for which French coined the term *dinosaur folio*) and every illustration was to be larger than life. The manuscript and art were ready within a year, and on August 19, 1985, the initial copy of the 50,000 copy print run was delivered to French's office by four special messengers.

About half an hour after the delivery, French's secretary (Ms. Barbara Ward) heard a loud noise



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emanating from French's office but assumed he had struck an author and did not investigate.

At three p.m. when she returned from lunch, she opened the door to see whether French had also returned. His latest production lay flat upon the floor, but French himself was not to be seen, and Ms. Ward assumed he would be absent for the remainder of the afternoon.

He did not return to his office the next day, however, nor the day after that. Telephone calls to his apartment on Fifty-third Street went unanswered. Eventually, another editor was installed in French's office, and his book was taken to the basement of the Cobb, Neil Building.

In 1986, a bored custodian (George H. Jackson) leafed through French's last production and discovered him pressed between the Afterword and the Index. He is reported to have discolored the paper.

French was at last interred, with his book (fortunately boxed) as his coffin. His epitaph reads: BERNARD A. FRENCH, 1933-1985, A PAGE AT THE COURT OF GOD.





### Mary Beatrice Smoot Friarly, SPV

Born Beatrice Smoot Friarly, Easter Sunday, 1925, in New Canaan, Massachusetts. According to Sister Mary herself, her birth on Easter was due entirely to the efforts of her mother (Martha Smoot Friarly) who would normally have given birth on Holy Saturday, but who contrived by an uncommon effort of will and with considerable pain to delay genesis until the minute hand of the large clock on the wall of the delivery room was well past twelve.

Mrs. Friarly was undoubtedly hoping for a boy. She did not, however, proceed to raise little Beatrice like one, but like nothing on earth.

When Beatrice was fifteen she appeared (weeping) one fine June morning at the door of Father John O'Murphy, her pastor. She had spent the previous twenty-four hours in prayer and had concluded that her vocation was real. She begged Father O'Murphy to bring her to the attention of





some order that might accept her as a postulant. Muttering that it would at least get her out of her mother's house, Father O'Murphy promised to see what he could do.

Approximately a year later (June 17, 1941), Beatrice entered her novitiate with the Sisters of Perpetual Vigilance, an order of nuns intent upon saving their oil for the coming of the bridegroom. Upon the completion of the vows, she took the religious name of Mary and took over the Fourth Grade at the school of Saint Apollos the Persuasive.

Her collection of cookbooks was begun somewhat late in her life, when the grateful mother of one of her pupils presented her with a tattered volume that had been passed from one generation to the next for nearly eighty years. That evening, Sister Mary spent half an hour looking it over, and was a collector evermore.

As such, she possessed but feeble means; the prices of all but the most humble dealers were far beyond her reach. But she had a considerable amount of time at her disposal, having discovered long ago that reading did her young charges more good than anything she could say; boundless patience; the good will of thousands of men and women now scattered across the face of the world who looked back upon the Fourth Grade as the happiest year of their lives; and a strange, unassuming, suppleness of speech that she attributed (when she was willing to admit that she possessed such a power at all) to nearly





fifty years of the most faithful prayer to St. Apollos.

On a sullen summer night not long ago, when black clouds gathered over the Hoosac Hills and the wind stirred like a restless child, Sister Mary completed her evening devotions and retired to bed. It was about nine-thirty.

A short time later, as it seemed to her, she heard a knock at the door of the small convent she shared with Sisters Bruno and Evangellica. For a moment or two she lay quiet, waiting for Sister Evangellica, who was much younger, to answer it. Then it came to her (she could not say how) that Sister Evangellica and even Sister Bruno slept on, and would go on sleeping though the knocking continued all night. That they could not hear it and would never hear it.

She rose then, went to the door, and opened it. It was raining, and the rain turned to steam when it struck the cloak of the short, dark man who stood at the doorstep. "Shalom," he said.

"Shalom," Sister Mary replied automatically, and he stepped across the threshold.

"And I mean it," he said. "I come in peace. I'm coming in answer—partly—to your prayers."

"You mean my prayers have only helped to condemn me," said Sister Mary, who had recognized him. "I'd hoped for more. But I'm sure the sentence is just, and I'm ready to obey it."

"So let me explain," the dark man said. "It's



not like you think. In fact, I gave up on you a long time ago. Can I sit down?"

"Please do," Sister Mary told him.

"And can I smoke? It won't bother you?"

"Not at all."

He began to smoke, mostly from the groin, but a good deal from the hands and the top of the head. "You've prayed to behold an angel," he said. "Your exact words were 'the least of Your messengers, Lord, would be sufficient for me.' Behold, I'm an angel, and not the least of His messengers."

"Come now," said Sister Mary.

"I'm Lucifer, the Morning Star. A real angel. You haven't read about me? A certain loose liver we both know pretty well said, 'I watched Satan fall from the sky like lightning.' That's nothing to you?"

"All right," Sister Mary said, "you're an angel. But a fallen angel wasn't exactly what I had in mind."

"I'm the archangel in charge of punishments," Lucifer explained. "That's all. Sure, I've had a lot of bad press."

"Please don't say it's a dirty job, but somebody had to do it." Sister Mary gathered her bathrobe more tightly around her, the unconscious legacy of ancestors who had donned armor a thousand years past. "Then you're saying you're not really evil after all?"

"If I were evil, would I come here to ask you to do good?"





"By the way, I didn't know you were Jewish."

"You need time to think, huh? Sure, I'm Jewish. If I weren't, would I cut the kind of deals I do? We're all Jewish. Gabriel, Michael, everybody. Even on Broadway, they know all the best angels are Jewish. Now you'll say I don't look Jewish."

"You don't, more Syrian or Greek. What's this about doing good? I thought you'd come to tempt me."

"I have." Lucifer rubbed his hands, which nearly went out. "I've got for you the one proposition you can't turn down—a chance to help somebody who really doesn't deserve it. Me. And do good at the same time. You've got the greatest cookbook collection in the world. You didn't know that?"

"I've got a very good one," Sister Mary acknowledged. "I've put in shelves in the attic. They're mostly up there."

"The best. I checked out everybody's. Now in that collection, you've probably got a lot of recipes for what you might call spiritual or mystical dishes, don't you? Like how to make sacramental wine, for instance?"

"You can hardly expect me to tell you that."

"Oh, I know. I was just for-instancing. But you've got it?"

"Certainly," Sister Mary replied with some pride. "I know how manna was baked. Do you want to know the broth simmered in the Cauldron of Cerridwen? I can tell you. And I can give you the





recipe for the dish of bitter herbs into which Judas thrust his hand."

"I know him," Lucifer said. "A real loser, believe me. No, my problem is I've got a dish I don't know how to cook. I've boiled it, I've baked it, and I've roasted it, but nothing helps. Would you have a look at it and see if you can help me out? Wait a minute—before you answer, let me say right off you won't find my kitchen an unpleasant place at all. You won't get burned, or anything like that. And what I'm trying to do—this is orders from On Top, you understand. You want to help Him out, don't you?"

"Yes," Sister Mary said.

At once the convent vanished, and she was surrounded by the leaping flames of Hell.

"Hey, don't be so panicky," Lucifer told her. "Didn't I say you wouldn't get hurt?"

"It's just that it was so fast."

"I like running the tollgates—a little hobby of mine. Come on, I'll take you to see him. Hey, what's the matter now?"

Sister Mary was looking at herself. "For one thing, I'm nude."

"Everybody is. That's the rule here. For you I'd like to bend it a little, but I can't."

"And for another thing, I seem to be about eighteen again."

"Nice-looking too. You should be proud, and I'm not saying that just because I'm in the business."



See, everybody here looks the right age to give other people the most pain. I'm naked too, you've noticed?"

"But you've got more hair than I do, and it's much better positioned. I'm not stirring a step until I get some clothes."

"All right," Lucifer said, "I know I don't have the rep, but I'm really a generous guy. Here's the entire habit the SPV was wearing when you joined. The black skirt, the wimple, the whole shmeer."

For a moment, Sister Mary could see it just as it had once hung in her closet at the convent. Then the cloth vanished in a flash of fire. The wire hanger melted to something like quicksilver and splashed the smoking stones of Hell. "I've been very foolish to allow you to bring me here," she said.

"Listen, if you could wear that stuff, everybody'd stare. This way, nobody'll notice. You want to get out? Come on."

They walked down a narrow valley where every ledge was occupied by a writhing figure. "I didn't know Hell was this crowded," Sister Mary said sadly.

"For people who don't like crowds, it's crowded. For people that do, lonely. Hey, there he is. We're in luck, sometimes he wanders around."

The man was tall and muscular. His face was expressionless, his skin a dull red.

"So look at him," Lucifer complained. "I've fried, I've chopped, I've boiled, and just look. That's agony?"





"Well, he certainly isn't smiling," Sister Mary said.

"He isn't anything. I work my tush off, but does he give one damn? Hell no. You're the expert, you're going to tell me what should I do? Go ahead, I'm listening. You think marinating might help? I've tried it. Sulfuric acid."

As if on cue, a dickens appeared. "From Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Chairman says so where is he?" the dickens announced. "It's line seven. I should tell him out to lunch?"

"Get out of here, you shmuck." Lucifer made Sister Mary a little bow. "I got to go. Look him over, okay? I'll be right back."

Sister Mary nodded, and he vanished in a puff of evil-smelling smoke. When it had drifted away, she said softly, "He knows what I'm going to do, you know. He knows exactly what I'm going to do. I find that encouraging, exciting, and disturbing. The universe is not as we thought."

The red-skinned man nodded slow assent.

"Or perhaps this is not the universe at all," she said. "Just a corner of a bad dream. But I know how to end it. Take my left hand."

"My hand burn you," the red-skinned man grunted. He extended it nevertheless, and when she clasped it, it did not. It was a man's hand, living and strong. She held it and knew she had lived her entire life for this moment. And that it had been worth it.

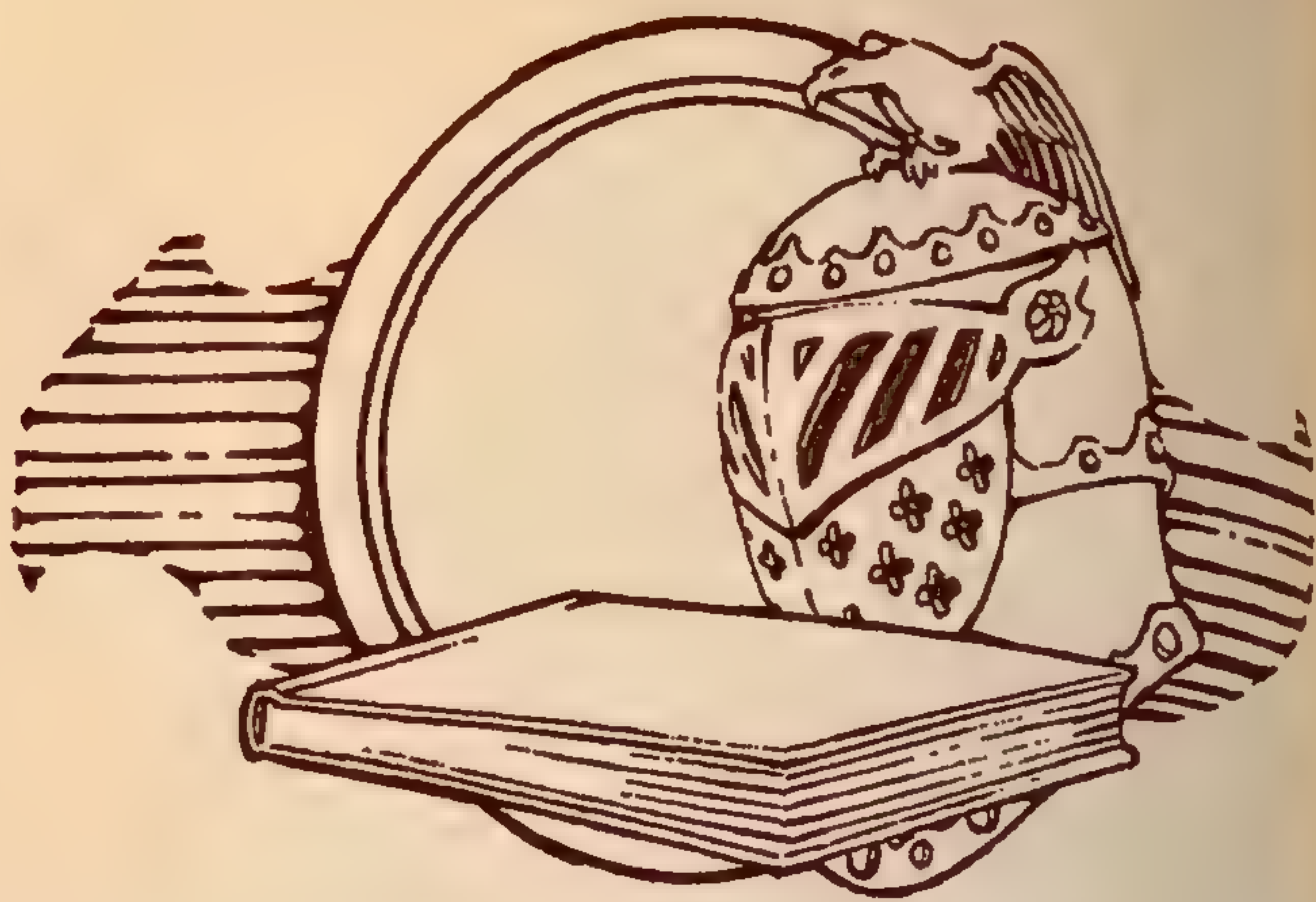


Then she crossed herself.

On the morning she awakened, there appeared in New Canaan a tall, swarthy man whom the people of the town have decided is a Micmac Indian. He does very little work, and sometimes he drinks too much. But he does no harm either (which is much the same thing as not working), and he is very strong, so they leave him alone. Besides being an Indian, he has another peculiarity, which is that he whistles softly whenever he sees Sister Mary.

Sister Mary no longer looks eighteen, and from time to time she slaps the boys' fingers with her ruler as she has for nearly fifty years; but now she has a peculiarity too. It is that on sullen summer nights when lightning flashes in the west and black clouds gather over the Hoosac Hills, she joins Man-on-Fire, the Micmac Indian, on his park bench and talks with him in tones too low to be overheard. She has told Monsignor O'Murphy, the pastor emeritus, that she is compiling a volume of Indian recipes.





## Sir Gabriel

By no means the least of Arthur's court, Sir Gabriel was born at Carcassone on Candlemas Day A.D. 503. In 519 he followed Sir Lancelot to Britain. In 522 he was knighted and deeded with the High Justice by Arthur, King of the Britons, who upon that occasion openly praised both his prudence and his joyous spirit. He was the hero of many adventures, and of his battle against the giant Mondregor a song was made that was still sung in the time of Robin Hood.

After Arthur's defeat at Camlan (A.D. 539), Sir Gabriel wandered aimlessly until his discovery of a certain book in a ruined castle near Glastonbury. He became so absorbed in the text that for a time he forgot not only his King, Camelot, and Mordred, but all Britain and himself as well. While in this nepenthean state, he felt a touch at his





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shoulder and looked about to see a sour-faced woman glaring at him.

"I am—" he said.

"You're my husband, Harry Appledorf," she told him.

And he was. The golden aura that had surrounded him vanished, and he sat in a small apartment in St. Louis. He knows that he was once Sir Gabriel of the Table Round; but he cannot be Sir Gabriel again, though now and again he returns to the book he found himself holding at the time his wife tapped his shoulder.

It was this one.

He died February 2, 1987.





## John Glaskin

Born Saltburn-by-the-Sea, in the North Riding, 1899.

In 1911, Glaskin, a poor village boy, made his way to London to seek his fortune. His first (anonymous) contributions to literature appeared in *The Boys Own Weekly* in 1913. He was soon a valued contributor to *The Yellow Book*, *New Witness*, and other influential publications. He was friendly with Mr. and Mrs. Virginia Woolf until the year after the latter's death, when Leonard offered to "dig up a girl for him too."

Shaw is said to have disliked Glaskin, whom he considered "a regular Don Juan." Gissing, on the other hand, treasured Glaskin, who had counseled him not to marry. Glaskin tried repeatedly to fix H. G. ("Bertie") Wells up with a girl.

In Paris during the thirties, Hemingway was much taken with Glaskin, believing he had thrown



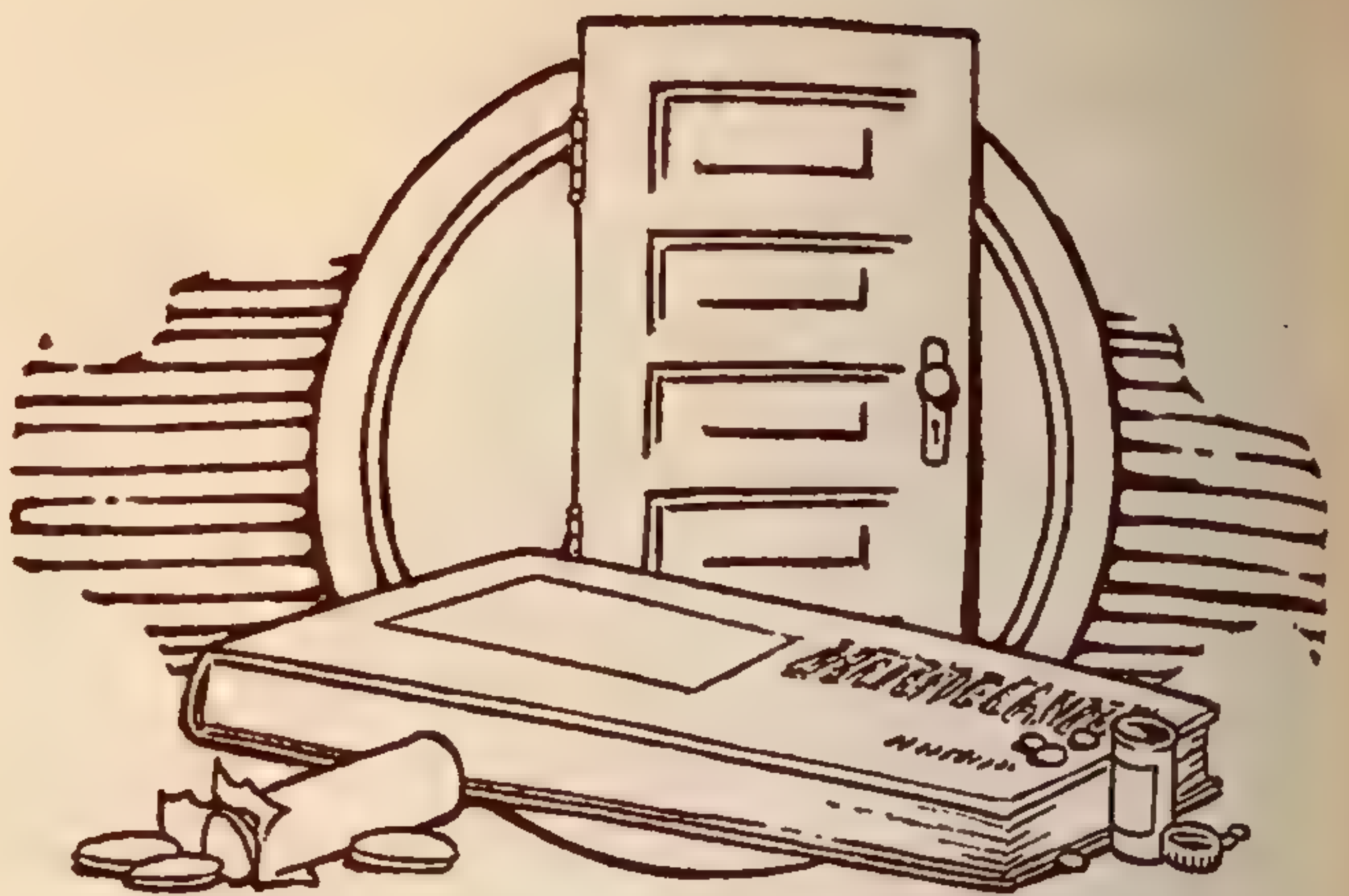
their fight. He carried Glaskin to Africa with him, where Glaskin, after bribing a porter to break Hemingway's glasses, amused his friend by lurking on Mt. Kilimanjaro in a stolen leopard skin. Eventually he was forced to abandon this practice (Hemingway fired at him several times) and Hemingway found the skin in the eternal snows, far above the timberline. Although Glaskin made many contributions to English literature, this may have been his greatest.

The best known works in the Glaskin *oeuvre* are (perhaps) *Sixpence for Buns* (imitated previously by Maugham), *Brideshead* (which inspired Waugh to write his classic *Brideshead Revisited*), and *You Can't Go Home at All*, a chronicle of his misadventurous attempts to return to Saltburn-by-the-Sea by rail.

Having gained literary immortality, Glaskin can never die. He presently lives in Kent under the name of Saunders, where he keeps bees and vice versa.

☐ This brief biography was kindly supplied by Kirk Patterson Arthurs, Ph.D., formerly of Harvard. Readers seeking more extensive information may consult his *Maze of Gray: John Glaskin Revisited* and *Sweet Sword, High Heart: Love and War in the Fiction of John Glaskin*.





### Kopman Goldfleas

Born in New York City, May 1, 1940. Upon graduation from high school, Goldfleas accepted a position as a retail clerk in a camera store in Manhattan, where he worked for approximately eight years. He married Sarah Greenglas Goldfleas in 1965. A son, Claude, was born the same year. During his employment as a camera clerk, Goldfleas trained himself as a photographer, and by 1964 was presenting himself as a professional and photographing weddings and bar mitzvahs, and selling news photos to various papers and magazines. In 1967 he resigned his position at the store, and from that time until his death supported himself and his family as a free-lance photographer, coming to specialize in the photographs reproduced in coffee-table art books. He became famous for his craftsmanship, and from 1975 onward may be said to have occupied the summit of his profession.



In 1980, Bernard A. French (q.v.), an editor for Cobb, Neil & Sons, commissioned Goldfleas to photograph Michelangelo's *Aphrodite Preparing to Seduce Paris*. Upon his arrival at San Benito, Italy, Goldfleas learned that the church wall on which the great artist had executed this masterpiece had been covered with white paint by the village priest, who considered the picture obscene. When the priest refused to allow him to remove the paint, Goldfleas requested, and received, permission to photograph the painted-over wall as proof, he said, of the impossibility of carrying out his assignment. Priest and villagers were amazed that three days of nearly constant effort were required, but Goldfleas successfully pleaded various technical problems.

Shortly afterward, he returned to New York and retired to his darkroom, from which he was never to emerge again. When questioned by his wife and son through the door, he replied that he was all right; but he would not tell them what he was doing or why he would not come out. After nearly a week, they attempted to feed him by slipping vitamin tablets and Necco wafers under the door. Eventually, Sarah Goldfleas called French and described the situation. French at once visited the apartment. As detailed in French's posthumously published *Perfection Unto Death*, Goldfleas explained that he had secured a photograph of the church wall in San Benito from which he believed Michelangelo's painting could be "brought up" by optical methods, much





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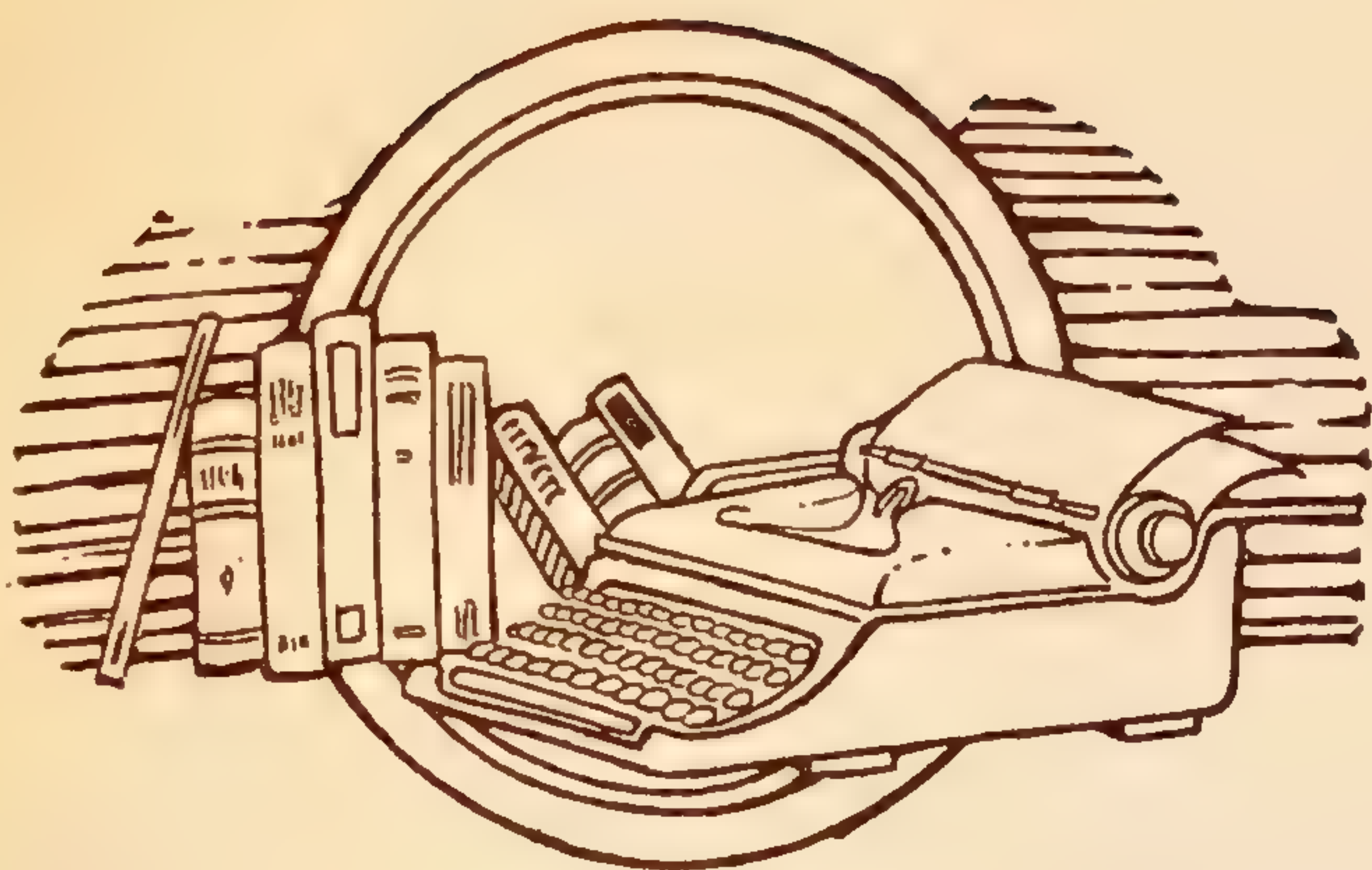


as palimpsestic writing is made to appear on the parchment from which it has been removed. French left, satisfied with Goldfleas's explanation.

By January 7, 1981, Goldfleas had ceased to answer his wife's knock, and it was observed by her and by his son that the vitamins and wafers were no longer removed. Thin slices of toast were attempted without result.

On January 9, Claude Goldfleas forced the door and found his father dead. Questioned by French, he volunteered the opinion that Goldfleas had "fallen for" the image of Aphrodite he had restored and would never willingly have surrendered it to his publisher. He further stated that he (Claude) had destroyed the negative and the many prints which he had discovered beside his father's body. Asked his opinion of "Aphrodite," he responded that he considered her overdeveloped. Subsequent attempts to photograph Goldfleas's Wall (as it is now called) have been fruitless.





## Peter O. Henry

Born January 22, 1965, Detroit, Michigan, the oldest son of a teacher.

Long after Henry was dead, his mother told a reporter how, when he was only four, she had discovered him surrounded by older children to whom he was telling a story. Some of the tales she preserved from a period hardly later, manuscripts scrawled in pencil and crayon, are at least good enough to earn the condemnation of most college writing workshops.

College was not for Henry, the oldest son of a poor woman with several younger children to support. He left school forever at the age of fourteen and worked for a time at an automobile dealership, washing and vacuuming the used cars accepted as trade-ins. During this period he is believed to have written "Two Cigarettes" and "A Black Goy."

In 1981, he was arrested for burglary. He





maintained his innocence in court, making plea-bargaining impossible, and as a result was confined for nearly three years.

When he was released, he left Detroit to live with his maternal grandmother in Verona, North Carolina. There he obtained employment in the textile industry. During this period he is believed to have written "The King of the Toads," "Wonder Mountain Melody," "The Highest Jail in the World" (perhaps his best-known story today), and "Bob at the Big Rock." All these, and many others we have lost, are thought to have been composed on the word processor of the Verona Public Library, which Henry was sometimes permitted to use after work when the library was closed and the librarians were straightening up.

In July of 1986, Henry lost all four fingers from his right hand while attempting to clear a jam in a knitting machine. He received over five thousand dollars in worker's compensation in recompense for this accident and was able to draw unemployment benefits for some time afterward. The money enabled him to purchase a portable typewriter and to make numerous repairs and improvements to his grandmother's home. In addition, he had ample time in which to write. It was perhaps the happiest part of his adult life. He wrote "A Hermit of Chance," "Go Down Where?," "Lost Cities, Empty Castles," and "Panix," among other works. It is known that he sought to have some of these stories published,



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and his "Dustywings" was accepted by *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, in which it appeared in November of the following year. "Dustywings" was to be the only writing of his to see print during his lifetime.

In late 1987, he was admitted to the hospital in New Bern, suffering from pneumonia. It is reported that he had lain drunk in a field throughout the previous night. He died two days later, on November 2. His "Purple Cat Tom" has been much anthologized, and his "Doll with a Broken Nose" was the basis for Lothar Schmidt's English-language opera "The Short-Nosed Doll," which is now traditionally performed around New Year's Day.





### John J. Jons, Jr.

Born Dallas, Texas, April 15, 1942. Graduated University of Texas, BA, 1963.

In 1974, Jons visited New York City for the first time, and like many first-time visitors developed "Manhattan's Revenge." While standing in Times Square, he discovered that his need for a public restroom had become extreme. Twenty minutes later, he was mugged in a subway comfort station, and when he recovered consciousness he resolved never to endure a similar crisis.

Being fortunately of independent means, he spent the next fifteen years in researching his book *A Guide to the Public Toilets of America*, which contained directions to hundreds of clean, safe restrooms throughout the fifty states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico, as well as instructions for discovering such facilities in localities not covered by the guide, all in a handy, pocket-sized



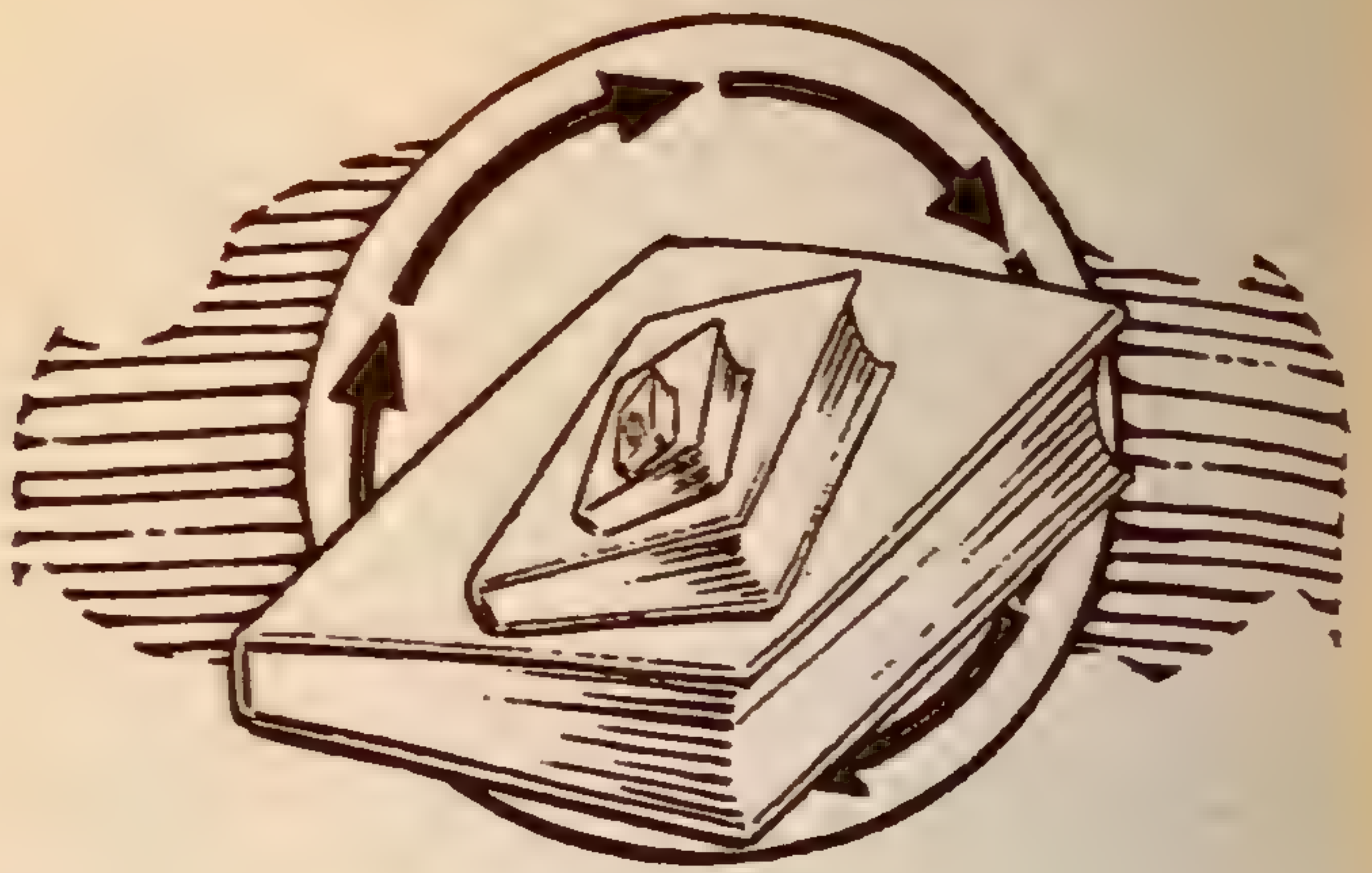
format. It was published to little notice in 1990, and within a year had sold over one million copies.

If Jons had not been rich already, *Jons's Guide* (as it came to be called) would have made him so; but it was ignored by the critics, and Jons was not so much as mentioned in most discussions of the candidates for the next Nobel Prize for Literature.

Incensed, Jons produced his *Meditation on the Utilitarian Theory of Literary Merit*, which he was forced to publish at his own expense. It was ridiculed by the critics and rejected by the reading public.

Jons died of accidental causes in 1998, having apparently attempted to clean the front sight of his .357 Magnum with his teeth and pulled the trigger in the process. A complete revision of his famous guide was discovered among his papers and published with a large promotional budget in 1999. Only after several million copies had poured from the presses was it discovered that the directions in the revised edition were uniformly incorrect. As specified in his will, Jons's grave marker is inscribed CLOACA DECEPTION.





## Xavier McRidy

Born 1939, in Taos, New Mexico. Presently residing in Berkeley, California.

McRidy began his controversial and as yet unfinished novel *The Paper Nautilus* in 1969. It concerns a reviewer for the overseas edition of the *London Times* (P. Derek Brewster-Higgenbotham) who is simultaneously reading and reviewing a novel (*Mr. Milton in Medoc*) by a mysteriously unsexed writer who signs himself (or herself) S. Peety. In *Mr. Milton in Medoc*, the title character, who falsely believes himself to be descended from the author of *Paradise Lost*, has retired to the South of France to compose a critical dissertation on *Allegiance to La Villa Real de la Santa Fe de San Francisco*, by Juan Gabriel Sabastian de Solo y Varios, in which an Argentine author (a thinly disguised surrogate for





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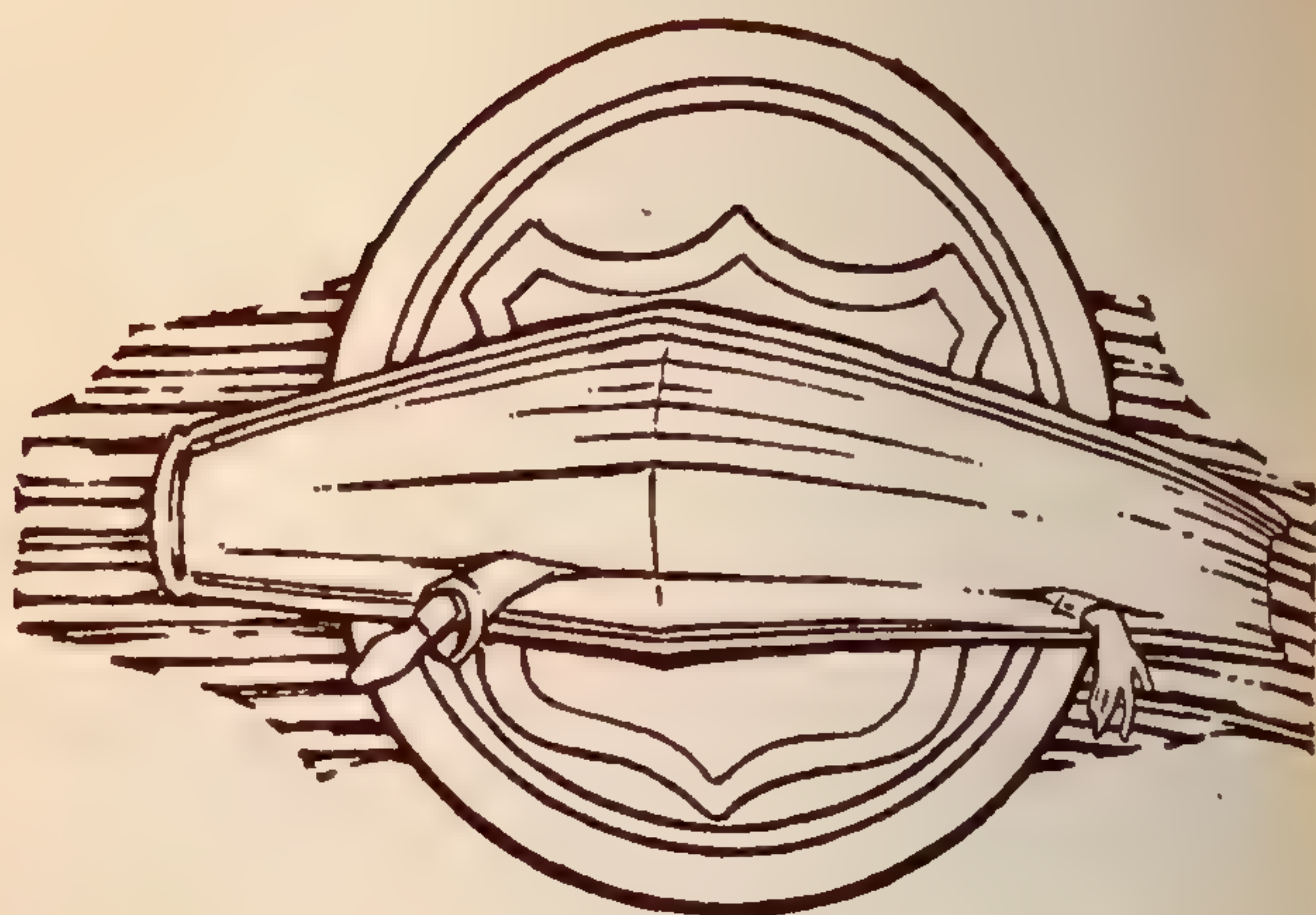
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de Solo y Varios himself) attempts to persuade a reluctant publisher in Buenos Aires to produce a Spanish translation of *The Paper Nautilus*.

Parts of McRidy's book have already appeared in *The Tar Baby*, a sometimes quarterly review published at Galapagos Junior College. These excerpts have been well received, and McRidy has hopes of a critical success if he can ever find his way out.





### Lieutenant James Ryan O'Murphy, NYPD

Born May 8, 1931, NYC. Accepted as a cadet by the New York Police Department in 1959. Transferred to the Bibliokleptcy and Plagiarism Squad, 1970. Promoted to Head of that squad, 1976. The following interview with Lt. O'Murphy appeared in the *New York Daily News* for February 31, 1988. It is used by permission.

DN: Lt. O'Murphy, just what does your squad do?

Lt. O'Murphy: We investigate all crime primarily concerned with books.

DN: Does that include bookies?

Lt. O'Murphy: No, that's gambling. I'm talking primarily about stealing books, stealing material from books, and forging books.

DN: The Hitler diaries, that sort of thing?

Lt. O'Murphy: Yes, if any criminal attempt





had been made to sell them or the rights to them in the city of New York.

DN: An attempt was made to sell the rights here, I believe.

Lt. O'Murphy: Yes, but the people who tried to sell them didn't know they were fakes at the time. That means no crime was involved, so it didn't come under the jurisdiction of the Squad. We were in touch with our opposite number in Bonn on that case, however.

DN: I understand there is a notorious book forger here in the U.S.—Louis Gold.

Lt. O'Murphy: That's right, but he never comes to New York, so we can't touch him personally. He operates out of Ohio. We pick up something of his every few years.

DN: Can you tell our readers a little about him?

Lt. O'Murphy: Certainly. Gold is a very high-class operator. If I may speak frankly, it's kind of a pleasure to go after a crook like that, a class act. He fakes only books that don't exist or that nobody has a copy of, so you can't compare his fake to any original. Then too, his materials are always right. You mentioned the Hitler diaries. The forger used notebooks that didn't exist when Hitler was alive. Gold would never have done that. I suspect that much of the Hitler material used to show up the diaries was actually created by Gold. That hardly matters, since





it would have been as good as original material, and maybe better and more characteristic.

DN: Can you give our book-collecting readers some tips on identifying Gold's material?

Lt. O'Murphy: All I can suggest is that they check the minute details, things Gold might have inserted as private jokes. This interview is dated February 31, for example.

DN: What about other instances of passing off fiction as fact? That movie "Zelig," or Professor Arthurs's capers?

Lt. O'Murphy: Movies don't come under me. That's another squad, but the next time Allen shows his face at Elaine's, they'll get him. Professor Arthurs has fled the country. I understand the Cambridge police are trying to have him extradited. If they succeed, we'll be interested.

DN: I can see that some of your cases must present a real intellectual challenge.

Lt. O'Murphy: The toughest in the Department.

DN: In mystery novels, the detective often has a friend who acts as a sounding board and sometimes offers suggestions. Do you—a real detective—have anybody like that?

Lt. O'Murphy: As a matter of fact, I do. When I get a day off during a really tough case, I drive up to Massachusetts to talk to my uncle. He's a priest, retired now.



DN: And that helps?

Lt. O'Murphy: Pretty often it does. Of course, I always tell him it's really the thinking time I have on the drive up and back. I wouldn't want him to get above himself. (Chuckles.)

DN: Could you tell our readers something about a case you're working on now?

Lt. O'Murphy: I'd be glad to, perhaps one of them can help. Right now we're working on the French Grave Robbery.

DN: Grave robbing?

Lt. O'Murphy: Yes. An editor named Bernard French was buried in one of his own books a couple of years ago. The title is *Great Lost Art of Western Europe*, by the way. Most of the copies were pulped, and the book is quite valuable now. Three weeks ago, at least two persons broke into the Forty-sixth Street Cemetery and opened the grave. Anyone with information concerning this crime should call headquarters and ask for me.

DN: French's checked out?

Lt. O'Murphy: Ha, ha!

DN: Wouldn't a book big enough to bury a man in be difficult to dispose of?

Lt. O'Murphy: We doubt that they're going to try to sell it uncut—it's too well known. They're probably planning to send it to Amsterdam, where the plates will be taken and so forth.

DN: Thank you, Lt. O'Murphy.





### Anne Parsons

Born November 7, 1935, in Kansas City, Missouri.  
Graduated 1955, Missouri State U.

In 1955, Parsons accepted a position at the Kansas City Learning Resource Center (then known as the Kansas City Public Library). She spent almost her entire career there, well liked, though not well known, by the rest of the staff. Three years before her scheduled retirement, she was promoted to the rank of Assistant Librarian. In that position, she was charged with the expansion of the Video Tape Section of the Audio Visual Department. Her superiors were horrified to find that her plan required the construction of a new building, a block from the present Learning Resource Center, that would house the entire non-educational and antieducational categories. Parsons's plan was discarded, and a new plan instituted that would utilize existing Learning Resource Center space. Parsons's protest that the



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new plan involved the elimination of the Resource Center's last collection of books was dismissed with gentle ridicule. The plan was put into effect, and the books were offered to the public at a price of ten cents each.

It was then that Parsons rose to public attention, astonishing not only her colleagues but the entire city. Drawing upon her life savings, she bought the entire fourteen thousand volumes and moved them into the abandoned building she had hoped to replace with her Video Tape Annex. There, in the evenings and on weekends, she offered them on "honor loan." A collection box near the door bore the sign IF THE BOOK HAS HELPED YOU, PLEASE GIVE; but no charge was made.

Initially, all went well. Few viewers visited the storefront facility, and Parsons was able to relax and "even read a little," as she said, while carrying out her duties. When representatives of the city's black community demanded that she include books by and about blacks, she pointed out Shakespeare's *Othello* and the collected works of Samuel R. Delany. Hispanic protests were quieted when she appeared on the six o'clock news to show a copy of *Don Quixote* and explain what it was. Obscene pictures spray-painted on her windows won her some public sympathy, as did several attempts to fire-bomb her building.

It was not to last. The number of viewers increased, and a brutal street gang, Arthur's Pages,





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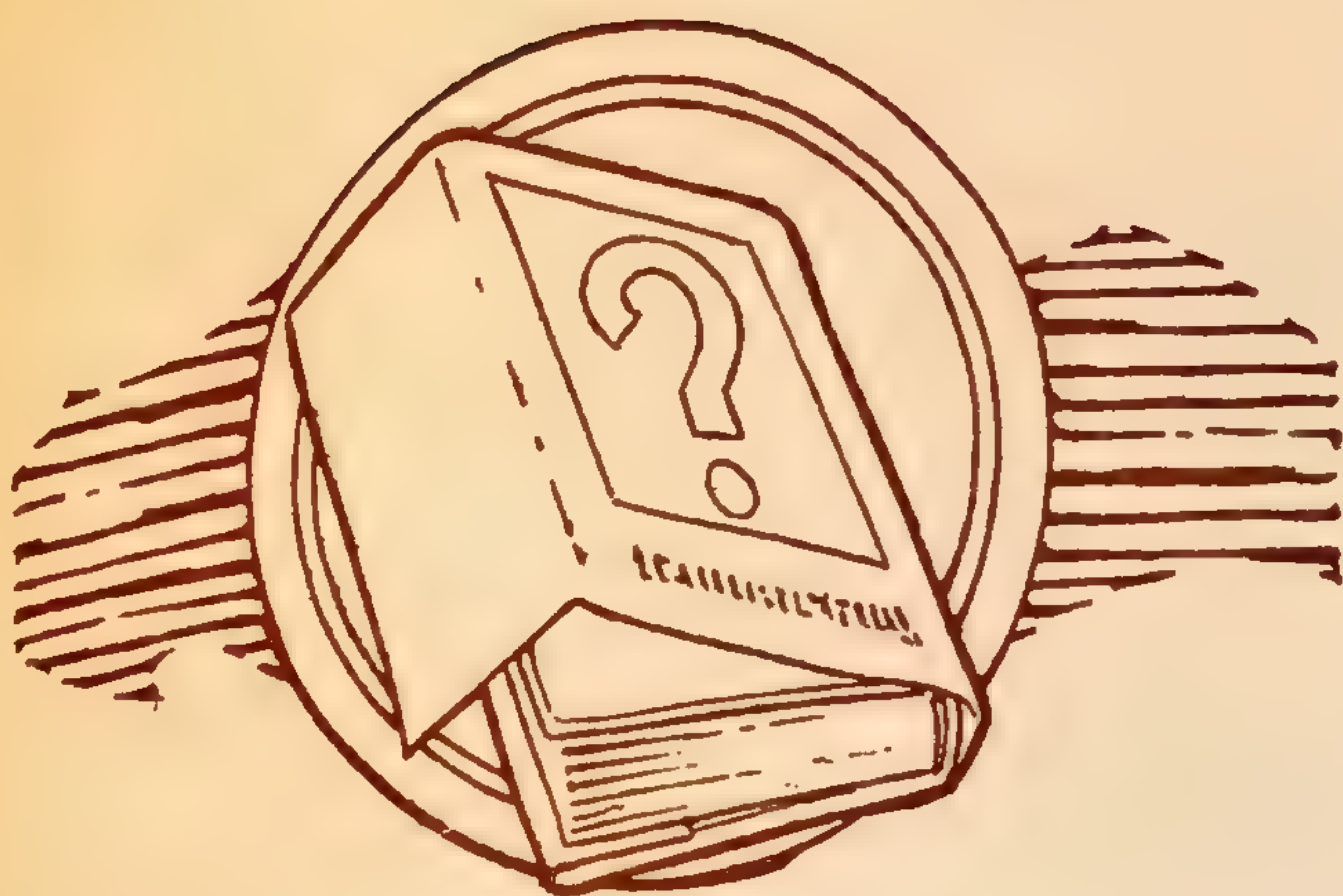
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appeared to protect them. When the body of George Bugge Ribberts, a convicted rapist, was discovered with a scrap of paper bearing the words "who kills a man kills a reasonable creature" in its mouth, it was suspected they were from some book; but Parsons refused to explain. Her request for public funding was subsequently denied.

At present, her operation is nearly overwhelmed. Most of the original collection is gone, and experts agree that her intention of purchasing an additional fifty thousand volumes with the money she has collected will only exacerbate her difficulties. She is said to be attempting to train a recent graduate in Learning Resource Science to assist her, but when asked about this, she would only say, "Shhh!"





### Adam (?) Poor (?)

Born 1951(?), possibly on the channel isle of Sark.

In 1975, Poor's *Voices Vocab*, a work by a hitherto unknown writer, was published to universal wonder and acclaim. (The doubtful biographical details above have been taken from its jacket copy.) It was a novel of a new kind, consisting entirely of unattributed dialogue. Poor's seven characters have boarded a train from Sark to Bournemouth. The train hurtles through its tunnel in total darkness. Three are women: Alice Precott, Gerta von Rednitz, and Rachel Blum. Three are men: Nigel Bates, Harry Guppy, and Bruce Burch. One, Robin Mink, is of indeterminate sex and may be a child. They speak, and the reader comes to realize that one is humble, complex, and secretive, one boastful and genuinely brave yet gripped by despair, one humorous and nearly insane, one lost in erotic dreams, one sensual and generous, one intoxicated by music, and one deeply religious in a faith of which no other



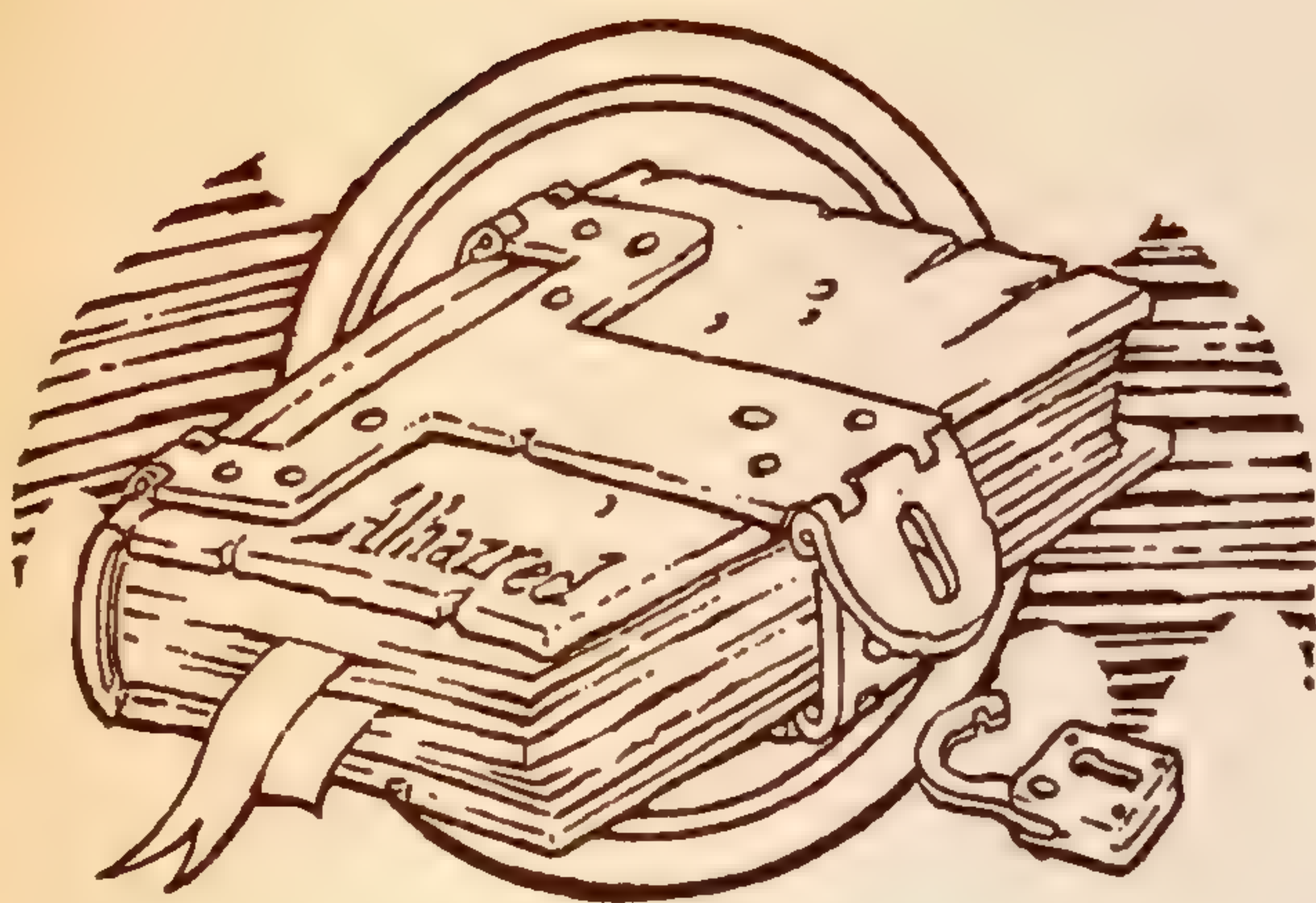
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human being has ever heard. The challenge is to determine which is which—to sort the characters out. It is possible that the tunnel linking Sark to Bournemouth has collapsed and they are in limbo, or that there is no tunnel.

Poor's next book (1976) was a detective story, *A Salted Mine*. The publisher stated (probably untruthfully) that it was an earlier work, produced now only because of the favorable reception given *Voices Vocabable*. A man is found murdered in a Washington, D.C. subway station; he is without identification. A detective is seduced and beaten, and solves the crime. A second detective appears who shows the solution to be false, clues having been planted and altered by the first detective. A third detective (who is in fact the attorney of the first detective) shows that the accusations made against the first are without foundation, he having been accused by the second to further his career. At the conclusion of the book, the reader realizes that the third detective is in fact the murderer—or rather, that he is meant to be the murderer, the clues that implicate him having been planted by a fourth party, Poor himself.

Attempts to locate Poor or even establish his existence have proved fruitless. Records indicating his birth on Sark have been shown (in an article in the *National Enquirer*) to be forgeries. His publishers are said to be holding his royalties in trust, and it has been alleged that Prince Charles and Princess Diana are among them.





## John K. (Kinder) Price

Born in Pottstown, Pennsylvania, April 3, 1873. The family moved to Dalton, Massachusetts in 1878. Price left school in 1889 and took a job in the shoe factory where he worked for 47 years before retiring as a foreman. In 1894, he married Amy (Prescott) Price. A son, James, died in 1895 shortly after birth, Mrs. Price in 1938.

Following her death, Price seemed to be at loose ends and experimented with a number of activities and hobbies; these included building ship models and stamp collecting. In 1939, he announced to a friend that he had discovered a pastime that would hold his interest for the remainder of his life: searching for a book of spells mentioned in a pulp magazine he had happened upon in a barbershop (believed to have been Ray & Bill's in Dalton). When the friend ventured to point out that the book so mentioned might not in fact exist, Price told him he was sure it did not, and it was this certainty of





its nonexistence that underlay the charm of the search. Because the book did not exist, he could neither fail nor end the search by discovering a copy.

During the following years, Price became a familiar figure in all the libraries and bookstores within a hundred miles of Dalton. He often traveled as far as Adams and was said to go at times to Springfield. Postal employees have reported that he frequently sent mail to (and received mail from) such little known localities as the Congo Free State, Persia, and Bithynia. The entry of the United States into World War II must have made Price's activities more difficult, but he appears to have continued them.

In 1952, a neighbor reported to the police that she had not seen Price in over a week, and that there were no lights in the windows of the Price house in the evening. The door was forced, but no body was discovered. Left vacant, the house was vandalized several times; it burned in 1959. Earlier, in 1957, a retired sole-cutter who had known Price as a foreman had reported seeing him near the Dartmouth campus, and he was said to have been spotted in 1961 and 1962 (and later) at garage sales in and around Boston.

The most recent sighting (1977) was in the stacks of the British Museum Library, from which he vanished before he could be apprehended. It is conjectured that Price has still not discovered the book he seeks; but he appears to have found *something*.





## Paul Rico

Born 1960, NYC.

Rico began to write in 1969, from the first using the dark green that was to become his trademark. Like those of most beginners, his earliest efforts were simple obscenities. In 1971, however, he reached public attention with *I JUST GOT REAL*. Beneath this, another hand inquired *HOW WAS SHE?* Rico silenced his critic (not for the last time) with *REAL GOOD*.

*I JUST GOT REAL* was followed in rapid succession by *DRACULA SUCKS*, *MARY POPPINS SHOOTS UP*, and *SAVE DOPE—SHOOT NIXON*.

During the winter of 1973, Rico frequented the rest room of the New York Public Library. He was excited by what he saw there, and transferred (and transformed) some of the images and ideas to the subway cars that were his own favored medium: *SAVE EARTH—PLUTE* (sic) *NJ*, *JUMP KERMIT*, *GOD IS*





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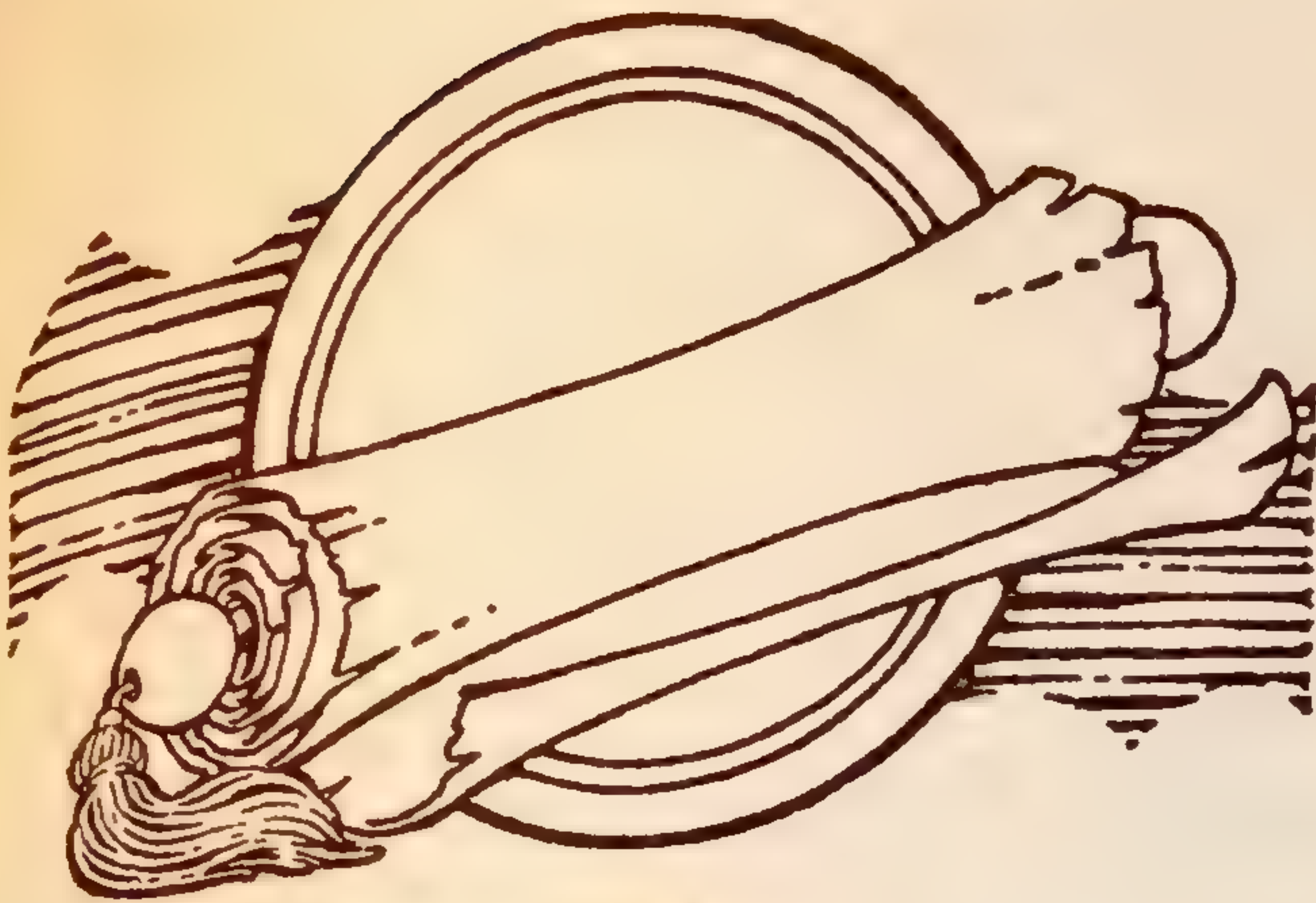
GODZILLA, CHE DOES IT WITHOUT CLASS, and his magnificent farewell to childhood, TIN MAN—DOROTHY DRINKS FROM HIS FUNNEL.

His political consciousness grew: FREEDOM OF THE WALLS!, HEMLOCK HUGH HEFNER, UP WITH SKIRTS (a precursor of the women's liberation movement), and SUPPORT PEACE OR DIE.

In 1975, one of his graffiti was mentioned in the *New York Times*. A friend called it to his attention, and the intellectual ambition that had stirred in him from his earliest days awakened fully: COOL AS I IS (cool as ice), WASPS A STING, FREE THE NINE WORTHIES, DIAL-A-DWARF—RING THE NIBELUNGS, and PERSEUS IS AFRAID OF SNAKES.

In 1981, Rico, then a senior at NYU, published a collection of his own unacknowledged writings under the title *Training the Mind*. Upon seeing a poster advertising his book, he found old impulses impossible to resist. Ducking into a nearby drugstore, he purchased a grease pencil and added a message his copy editor at once altered to HOT SHEET!





## Rishi

Perhaps born c. 3500 B.C., though Sloan says 3300. A man of the greatest wisdom, he is reported to have spent the last forty years of his life living in a cave on a mountaintop. By day he spoke with the gods, by night with spirits, and with animals and the winds at all times.

In the oldest surviving legend of Rishi, it is said that a certain young man came to him declaring that he sought wisdom and begging Rishi to tell him how he might become as wise as he. To this Rishi replied, "My son, it is a matter of no difficulty. Go you down this mountain till you come to the path that runs beside the river. Follow it till you reach the village where *The Book of Wisdom* is kept. Study it well, and you will be wise."

"I dislike those paths that run beside rivers," answered the young man, "because of the biting insects one always finds there. Instead, I will follow





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the Road of the Purple Hills. It may be that it too will lead me to *The Book of Wisdom*." And he went away.

Ten years later, a young woman visited Rishi, and she too wished for wisdom.

"Nothing could be easier, my daughter. Descend this mountain till you reach the path by the river. There are no insects, or at least very few. Follow the path, read from *The Book of Wisdom*, and you will be made wise."

"I have already seen that side of the mountain," the young woman answered. "Now I wish to see the other." And she went away.

Ten years later, a man of middle years came to Rishi. "I have worked all my life," he said. "Yet I have nothing to show for all my effort but a very small sack of gold and a house in the town. How shall I satisfy my spirit?"

"You must gain wisdom," Rishi told him. "Go down this mountain, where the eternal rocks and tumbling streams are so beautiful a man might wish to see them a thousand times. Continue till you come to the path by the river. Follow that path to the village where *The Book of Wisdom* is, and study it even as I once did. Then you will know the Lot of Man, and your spirit will be at peace."

"I know those little river villages," the man said. "They haven't two coppers to rub together." And he went away.

Ten years later, when Rishi was very old, a



youth came to him who was so handsome, so bold of bearing and so bright of eye, that Rishi longed to have him for his disciple from the moment he saw him. "Do you wish wisdom, my son?" Rishi called to him. "I can tell you how to become as wise as I, and it is very easy."

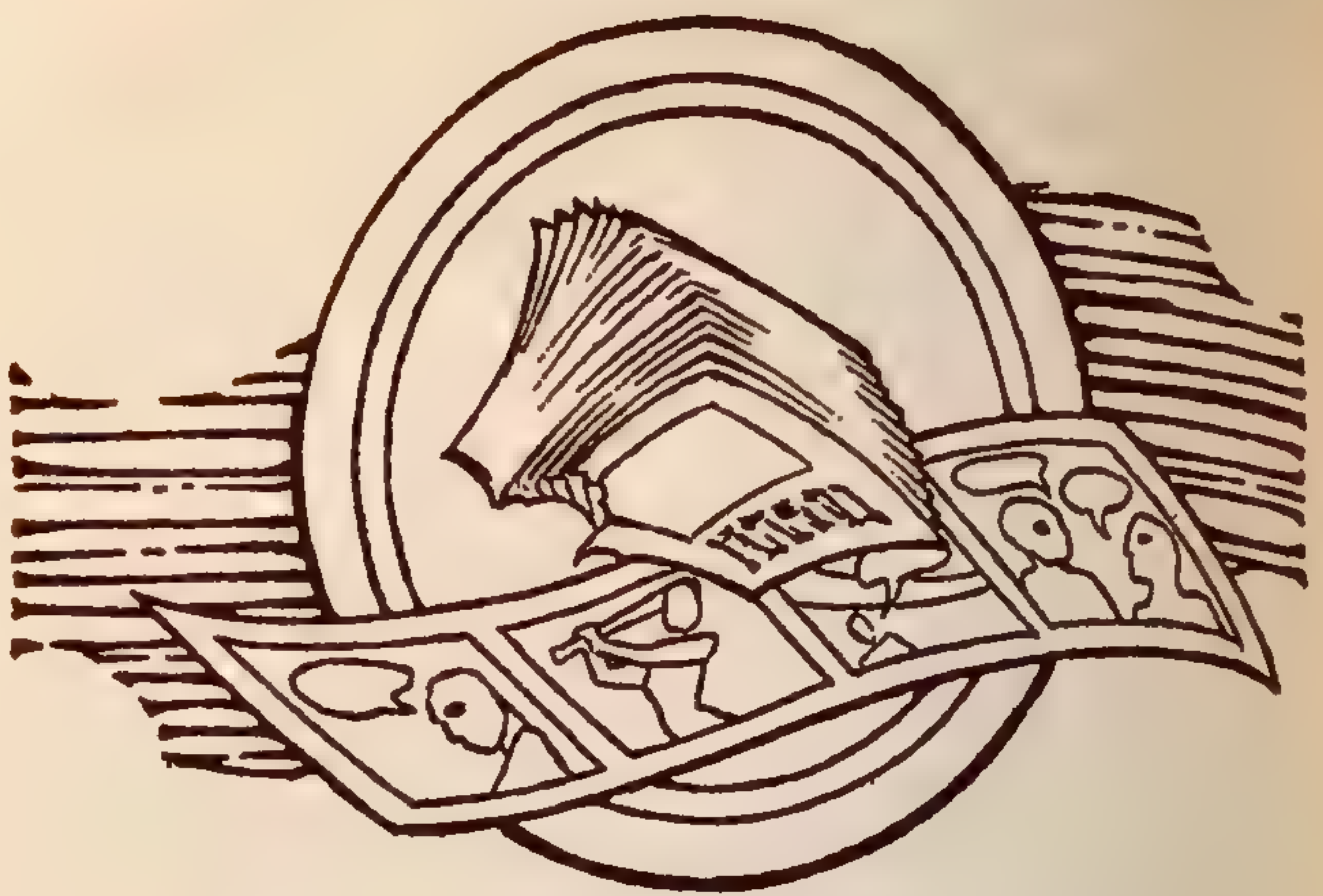
The youth knelt at his feet. "You are too good, Great Rishi," he said. "It is in search of wisdom that I have come to you, fording many swift streams and crossing fields of snow."

"Then go down this mountain," said Rishi, "till you are come to the path beside the river. Follow it till you reach the village where *The Book of Wisdom* is. The villagers are all kindly folk, for they hear that book read every day. Do you also read it, and you will be as wise as I."

"Hearing and obedience, Great Rishi," said the youth. "Though I should outlast this mountain, I should be in your debt." And he went away.

In the final year of Rishi's life, he who had been the youth returned; but he did not hold himself boldly, nor were his eyes yet bright. "Great Rishi," he said, "there is no longer a path."





## Skeeter Smyth

Born May 14, 1969, on the desk of Chick Beal, a sports reporter for the *Chicago Daily Star*. Skeeter, a shortstop for the Cubs, appeared on the third sports page with the rest of the players, not the comics page. Although Beal desired otherwise, throughout Skeeter's many amusing adventures he seems to have been considered primarily an athlete, not a cartoon character.

In July, 1972, when a particularly damaging decision had gone against the Cubs, Skeeter threw the homeplate umpire to the ground, sat on his chest, and actually forced him to eat his rule book. (A gossip column in a rival paper reported that the umpire closely resembled James H. Mago, editor of the *Daily Star*.) Baseball being baseball, Skeeter received a heavy fine and long suspension.

After that, he wasn't very funny any more. He was often seen wandering along Rush Street complaining about his luck, sleeping in el stations, or





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wriggling under the fence to watch Cubs' games in Wrigley Field.

But those few who smiled did so bitterly, and at the end of the season Beal left the *Daily Star* for the *Indianapolis Chronicle*. Mr. and Mrs. Beal separated, she preferring to remain in Des Plaines with her parents.

Skeeter was traded to the Indianapolis Indians. The rule book incident continued to haunt him, however, and after Beal quarreled with Managing Editor Rupert Braun, Skeeter ate a rule book himself while taking a penitential shower.

He was traded to the Julius, Georgia Patriots after that, and appeared occasionally on the last page of the *Julius Emperor*. Most of the jokes were about his teaching the bat boy to chew tobacco. The April 3, 1978 issue announced in a small box that he would no longer appear.

Beal doubtless knew of it, though he had been absent from his job at the paper for the preceding three days. On April 4, at about 1:15 a.m., he left Jeff's Stop & Go Roadhouse and was struck and killed by a United Freightways truck on U.S. 19. It was not apparent why he had tried to get across the highway, and several patrons of Jeff's Stop & Go later made why-did-Chick-cross-the-road jokes, none of which were as funny as most of the strips. The *Emperor*, however, published a drawing (April 10) showing a headstone inscribed Skeeter Smyth, RIP. It was drawn by Charles Perkins, 20, a journalism intern at the *Emperor*.





## The Woman Who Resigned

When she came to town, no one thought she was anything special, just a thin woman with dark hair and no makeup, a woman that might have been twenty-five or thirty-five. She checked into the Big Tree Motel and said she didn't think she'd stay long. Mrs. Collins, who runs the place with her husband, says she doesn't think she had much money.

She ate once or twice at the Red Hawk Cafe, and then she was gone. About a week later, Joe Bensen and Tommy Tolle found her clothes at the edge of the woods. The sheriff thought she'd been murdered, and he had men looking for her for a couple of days.

I've seen her clothes; they're all tied up in a plastic bag in the courthouse, with a tag that says JANE DOE. There are panties and a bra, both pink to start with, a pair of faded Wrangler jeans, and a woman's flannel shirt. You can tell it's a woman's





shirt because there are no pockets. The shoes are canvas, with rubber soles about half worn out—the kind of shoes you buy at K-Mart. There aren't any stockings; I doubt she wore them.

It wasn't till years later that the deer hunter brought in what he'd shot and asked people what it was. It wasn't human, you could see that, but it wasn't any kind of animal either. It wasn't much bigger than a child, real thin, with real thin arms and legs, and long, long fingers and toes. Some people said it was a human, but most people said it wasn't, and when the coroner tested the blood, he said so too. Mrs. Collins, she said she knew what it was, but she wouldn't say. She told me when I talked to her for about an hour, but when she tried to look for the register book to get the name, it had been thrown out. "I think she just gave up," Mrs. Collins said. "Gave up and went someplace else. I've felt like doing that so many times myself."

I said the thing that had been shot wasn't a human.

"But that's what you want, isn't it?" Mrs. Collins said. "Just to quit the job of being one, give up on everything and go somewhere far away. Haven't you ever noticed how far away a bird is from us? It'll sing to you, but you can't talk to it, and it doesn't care if you live or die."

She had kept the things the woman had left behind in her room, and she showed them to me. There wasn't much: a box of tampons that had never





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been opened, a lipstick and an empty compact and so on. But there were two books, and those interested me. One was Grimm's *Fairy Tales* with pictures by Arthur Rackham, a beautiful book, but worn and torn like she'd read it a thousand times. The other was a college book, *Genetic Engineering Practice*. There was a name inside the cover of that one, but it was a man's name, and you couldn't read the last name.

And that's all there is to tell, at least so far. She's dead (if that was her) and people have pretty much forgotten about it. A few deer hunters have come back with stories about seeing something in the woods, but deer hunters have been seeing something in the woods ever since the world began, I guess.

The only thing is that last night when I was out in the woods myself—looking, you know—I got turned around and couldn't find my car again. So when I finally hit a road I went along it to a farmhouse to ask where I was. And the woman there, she had set out a pretty little china bowl of milk with some crackers and stuff crumbled up in it. When I asked her what it was for, she said for the dog, but the dog was inside with her. I don't suppose it means anything, but it makes me wonder.



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Mr. Hiroshi Hayakawa  
Executive Vice President  
Hayakawa Publishing Inc.  
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Tokyo, Japan

Dear Mr. Hayakawa,

Let me tell you a story. A nurse I knew had as her patient a brilliant young man who was dying, and when her duties permitted it, she often sat and talked to him. Day after day he told her all he would do when he was well at last: how he would go to the university, travel across the world, walk softly into the dark rooms where the sick cough out their lives.

He grew weaker, and at last delirious; but in his final moment of clarity he told the nurse





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he had spoken to the powers at the edge of the universe, and they had promised he would do all he wished. That night he died.

The next day, as she walked to the hospital, she thought she saw the young man's face on the cover of a new magazine at the kiosk on the corner. When she looked closer, it was not he, not a face at all. And yet when she glanced over her shoulder as she walked away, she seemed to see him again. Although she is an American, her mother came to our country from Japan; and at that moment she said a word in Japanese for which we have no equivalent in English. I am told it means *ten thousand years*.

Faithfully,

Gene Wolfe



